



**It's Always
Been You**

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It's Always Been You by PrettyBlossoms

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Summary:

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Richie stared at the poster on his wall, wanting to sink into non-existence. "We're best friends, Eddie. Nothing more, nothing less."

Eddie's face pinched, and he desperately wiped away the moisture running down his cheeks, "W-what if I said I didn't want that anymore?" He sobbed.

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Author's Note:

Okay, so I need to take the moment to thank AgentMothman (AKA my twin) for editing this one shot that I have been working on! If you like anything that I write, make sure to check out her AMAZING series. The title is Lovesong. It is one of my favorites! She writes beautifully and brings the story to LIFE, which is not something all writers can do. I aspire to be like her. :D

Richie sighed as he watched the lights in the auditorium flicker between vibrant hues of color. The music was blaring and practically seeped out of the building onto the streets of Derry. After four years in high school, the Losers had finally made it to one of the nights that was supposed to make the struggle all worth it: prom. During late night sleepovers, they would all gather around in a circle and discuss what they wanted to happen. *Bill started first, "I just w-want prom to be our last h-hoorah before we start college. I am the happiest when I am with a-all of you."*

Ben went next, staring at Beverly out of the corner of his eye. "I want to be with the girl of my dreams, wearing a red lily boutonniere just like the corsage I'll place on her wrist. I want to dance the night away and fall in love with her all over again."

Richie laughed, pulling Eddie closer to him as he raised his flask and took a massive swig. "Ohhhhh~! Ben wants to get laid and make a prom night dumpster baby!"

Eddie rolled his eyes and punched Richie's arm, eliciting a groan out of the older man. "First off, it wouldn't be a prom night dumpster baby if it's conceived the night of prom, idiot. Secondly, you're fucking disgusting. Now shut up, Trashmouth, it's Beverly's turn."

Beverly's cheeks burned crimson; part of her felt like Ben was talking about her, but they had fizzled out a long time ago. "I just want to be as beautiful as you guys all make me feel."

The boys all smiled halfheartedly. Now that they were older and more mature, they understood that her father had damaged her and made her feel like less of a woman. So, every opportunity that arose to make her feel special, they took without hesitation.

"I want to be free, like a bird in the sky. I just need one night where we don't have to worry or stress out about our social class in high school. Most of all, I...want to do something entirely outside of my comfort zone." Stan looked at Bill, but then averted his gaze to the floor before the other boy noticed.

"I kinda agree with Ben's answer," came from Mike, "I'd love to find a classy girl, good enough to bring home to my grandpa. He's getting old, so I'd like to show him that I'm going to be okay."

Stan rubbed circles on Mike's back reassuringly, and Eddie went next. His answer seemed rushed and rehearsed as if he had been practicing in the mirror. "By the time prom comes around, I'd like to be comfortable enough to be dating."

It was not news to all of them that Eddie's germaphobia conflicted badly with the dates he had been on in the past. Therefore, he had never had an actual girlfriend. Which also meant that he'd never even been kissed. Sure, he had plenty of opportunities, but every time he started to see the finish line, a mile long list of why he shouldn't shot through his head.

"Aww, my spaghetti man, I'm sure you'll snag yourself a perfect little meatball!" Richie cooed and grabbed Eddie's cheeks, only to have his hands swatted away.

Eddie's face flushed and his brown eyes glistened with annoyance, "Don't touch my face, Richie. I have no idea where your filthy hands have been."

Richie smiled sinfully and went to tickle the boy's hips instead, "You should know exactly where they have been, Eds. Just ask your mother-"

The other six losers butted in simultaneously; "Beep Beep Richie."

Richie pouted and crossed his arms in defeat, taking the time to glare at each one of them.

"Y-your the last one, Richie. How do you want your prom to go?"

"Do you even have to ask, Big Bill? I'm going to get fucking laid! Hell, maybe even twice."

They all laughed and raised their vodka filled shot glasses up to the center, making a toast; it was a silent promise that they would all be united at prom, just as they had been in the sewers, years ago. Eddie chugged down his drink, a visible grimace on his face.

And it would have all been worth it, had the Losers Club not dissolved less than four months ago. After Richie suddenly up and left the group without so much as an explanation, everything just fell apart. One by one, they stopped meeting at the Quarry until only Bill remained. They all moved on with their lives, made new friends, and focused strictly on their own aspirations. Stan had tried to pull everyone back together on numerous occasions, but Richie never budged.

Not because Richie didn't love or miss the Losers. Hell, it was the exact opposite; he loved them all so much that he yearned to reach out to them again. After all, they were the only sunlight he had in his miserable life. But he knew deep down inside of him that he didn't deserve them, or anything, for that matter. Not after he single handedly crushed Eddie like a paper mache doll on that cold winter night.

Richie and Eddie were sprawled out on his bed, kissing like their lives depended on it. Richie was underneath Eddie, trailing his fingertips up and down the younger man's back as a means of silent encouragement. Eddie's arms wrapped around Richie's neck while his hands tangled into Richie's dark locks, roughly tugging and eliciting a moan out of the other. Richie growled low in his throat, and he grabbed onto Eddie's hips and switched their positions so he that was on top. He smirked down at Eddie, who pouted back up at him.

For weeks now they had fallen into the same routine of coming to Eddie's house and making out on his bed every day after school. Neither one of them even remembered how it started, but they didn't do anything to stop it either. Richie had so much pent up sexual frustration that he welcomed Eddie's advances like a starving man. The asthmatic had grown into a handsome man with a beautiful face, defined jawline, and sparkling brown eyes that could go from sweet to challenging in an instant. Richie

always thought of Eddie as a fire; a powerhouse of passion, with emotions that were uncontainable. In the back part of Richie's head, he was grateful that Eddie was letting him this close. After all, every fire could be put out.

For Eddie, though, it was an entirely different story. For a long time now he knew that him being gay was a huge possibility. After all, he was never attracted to a woman in all of his seventeen years of life. Sure, they were pretty, and they even smelled nice, but there was a magnetic force field pulling him towards the smell of old spice and cigarettes instead. Ever since he and Richie were kids they had been closer than most friends should be. As they hit puberty, Eddie's eyes lingered on Richie for far too long, taking in all of the features that he used to take for granted. When they were together, Eddie felt a mixture of emotions, like he could either conquer any obstacle or crumble to pieces. Richie was like ice; he lacked the ability to show his true emotions, hiding instead behind a happy facade. Similar to that element, anyone with eyes could see right through its transparency. At least, Eddie could. Especially on nights where Richie would sneak into his window, shattering the minute Eddie's arms enclosed him. And it was on a night like that when he realized that deep within the depths of his heart, he loved Richie Tozier.

By the time Richie and Eddie separated from the kiss, Eddie was panting heavily in a desperate attempt to fill his lungs with oxygen. But Richie wasn't done, and his lips grazed Eddie's chin. Subconsciously, Eddie turned his head, which gave Richie enough access to attack the sensitive skin on his neck.

Eddie's head became heavy and he rolled it back into the pillow, biting his bottom lip to prevent an embarrassing moan from surfacing. Eddie knew Richie heard it anyway when he felt Richie's lips against his skin in a smug smirk.

Richie's hands ghosted down Eddie's body until they reached his hips. Slowly, he pushed his hands under Eddie's shirt and began to rub circles on the sensitive skin there. Upon hearing Eddie's breath hitch in his throat, he began to suck and nip at the skin on his neck, leaving an array of purple bruises behind.

"F-fuck, R-Richie."

"What do you want, Eds?" Richie asked against his neck, placing a kiss on

the skin right behind his ear.

Eddie shivered at his ministrations as the possibilities swam through his brain. He always dreamed of being under Richie, in a stage of euphoria as their bodies intertwined. At this very moment, he could easily bring the fantasy to fruition. And he almost did, until he realized that it would be more than just a sexual encounter- at least, for him. No matter how much he wanted Richie, there was something that he needed even more than even that.

"What are we, Rich?" Eddie asked so quietly that Richie wouldn't have heard had he not been so close to Eddie's neck.

Richie immediately stiffened as a lump got caught in his throat. His body recoiled and he moved to reposition himself on the bed, trying to look at anything but Eddie's face. Fuck, he had been so preoccupied with satisfying his libido that he didn't stop and realize that every action has a consequence. And maybe, just maybe, it would have been okay had the person who caused his hard on not been his best friend.

Eddie felt his eyes stinging as tears clouded his vision. Richie wouldn't even look his way, but Eddie was undeterred. "What are we, Richie?" His voice cracked, threatening to shatter at any moment.

Richie stared at the poster on his wall, wanting to sink into non- existence. "We're best friends, Eddie. Nothing more, nothing less."

Eddie's face pinched, and he desperately wiped away the moisture running down his cheeks, "W-what if I said I didn't want that anymore?" He sobbed.

Richie's head snapped to look at Eddie so abruptly that his neck could have cracked. Dread flooded his features and his words came out like potent venom. "What the hell are you talking about, Eds? You don't want to be friends anymore?"

Eddie's heart pounded harshly in his chest, but he continued. "You have it all wrong, Rich." He paused, mustering up the courage to look into Richie's eyes, almost pleading for acceptance. "I-I want to be so much more."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Eds." Richie tried changing the

subject, "You're just-"

Eddie cut him off, "-In love. With you. It's always been you, Richie."

Richie stopped breathing as Eddie's words reached his eardrums. His stomach churned uneasily as he felt bile rise in his throat. All he could do was shake his head in disbelief as his fists closed tightly. Richie Tozier was good at many things, but falling in love-- with a man at that, had never been on his agenda. Now he was staring at the single most important person in his whole world, watching tears out of Eddie's wide doe eyes.

Richie saw how much emotion those eyes held; there was so much sadness and uncertainty, but one radiated through and reigned supreme. Unconditional love.

Love for him.

Richie didn't know which one hurt most; the thought of giving in to his emotions or seeing Eddie so torn up, over him of all things. Regardless of how he felt, his instincts took over. And they told him to flee. "I'm sorry, Eddie. I have to go."

Out of habit, the unruly curly-haired teen reached for a cigarette out of his back pants pocket, only to feel nothing but the shape of his own ass. Fuck. He must have accidentally left them in his jeans pocket at home, after all, he only just gotten dressed ten minutes ago. Initially, he wasn't going to come to prom, but he couldn't keep a beautiful redhead with dazzling blue eyes off of his mind. He grasped onto the plastic container in his hand tightly as more people passed by him, giving him confused stares.

Richie blushed in partial embarrassment, realizing that he must have looked like an idiot just standing there with his hand in his back pocket, watching as flocks of students poured into the building.

With a defeated groan, he walked up the stairs and entered the building. He didn't take the time to appreciate the decorations, theme, or even the refreshments. When he finally found what he was looking for, he faltered; Ben was sitting alone, next to all of the other boys without dates, twiddling his thumbs. His tux was a cream color and in his chest pocket, there was a red lily boutonniere. The

brunette's shoulders were slumped and his head hung low in defeat. Without wasting any time, Richie walked over and plopped down on the empty seat next to him reaching over one of his long arms to enclose Ben in a side hug.

Ben's eyebrows furrowed and his face pinched, "Richie?" He whispered, "What do you want?"

"Damn, you're breaking my heart, Haystack. Where's my hello?" His voice shifted into one of his best British accents, "*It's been far too long*."

Ben huffed out a breath of air, "Yeah, says the one who left us. What are you doing here?"

Richie felt like he was kicked in the gut, but he nodded his head anyway. "I deserve that. Look, I had my reasons. I don't expect you to understand, or forgive me or anything. And, to answer your question, I'm obviously here to get laid."

Ben smiled at that, reminiscing on the fond memory of the good old days. After a few moments, his eyes widened as he became increasingly confused. "Why are you over here then? I'm sure you'd prefer to go to the other side of the room...Y'know, with the girls?"

Richie chuckled and was about to answer when Ben's body stiffened. His mouth hung wide open and his brown eyes glistened with affection. Richie followed his gaze and smiled upon seeing Beverly. She wore a tight-fitting white dress that perfectly framed her curves. She had never been fond of jewelry, but tonight she was wearing a vintage pearl necklace. Her hair was partially up while the rest of it was down, brushing down her shoulders. Her crystal orbs only scanned the room for a few moments before slowly lowering to the ground. Reluctantly, she started to walk towards the single female's section.

Richie watched as all the admiration evaporated from Ben's eyes and he sank back into his chair. Ben stared down at his hands and fumbled with them in his lap. Richie couldn't help but feel for him and, slowly, he placed the plastic container in Ben's open hands.

Ben's face glazed with shock as he looked to Richie. "Is this-?"

"Yeah, a red lily corsage. You should know; you're wearing the other half of it." Richie patted Ben's chest.

"I know what it is...but why?"

Richie smiled wholeheartedly, "Go get the girl of your dreams, Haystack. Make her realize just how beautiful she is." He paused, thinking of the asthmatic as his lips narrowed into a straight line. "Don't make the same mistakes I have."

Ben's lips stretched into a giant smile and tears welled up in his eyes. He stood up with a newfound confidence and pulled the taller male in for a hug. "Thank you, Richie."

Richie slapped his back as he whispered in the other man's ear, "Go make your prom night dumpster baby, Benny."

Ben lightly pushed the other man away from him and laughed, "Go get laid, Tozier."

"I'm trying!"

Richie watched as the poet gravitated towards the crowd of single ladies, taking considerable strides. All of the girls parted ways making room for Ben, and Richie was silently cheering. Even though he couldn't hear anything, he stared at them with anticipation. Ben didn't stop walking until he was face to face with Beverly.

"Hey, Beverly." Ben beamed, unable to control his happiness as their eyes met.

Ben didn't know it, but Beverly's own emotions overcame her. Without exchanging any words, she jumped out of her seat and threw her arms over him.

"Bev?" Ben asked as his face flushed red and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"I've missed you, Ben. So much."

Ben stood, flabbergasted, and his eyes darted to Richie. Richie made inappropriate hand motions at him, which definitely did not help. He took a deep breath, and hugged her tightly. The smell of her cinnamon shampoo was all he needed for everything to come flowing back. "You know, even after all of these years, you're hair is winter fire." Beverly pulled away at his words and he almost flinched but instead focused on fumbling the plastic container open.

Shakily, Ben brought the corsage out of the plastic container and stared at Bev with uncertainty.

Beverly's face was lit up, and her eyes glistened with fresh tears. "My heart burns there too."

Without any rush, they made their way towards the dance floor. Ben placed his arms around her waist, and Beverly set her arms around his neck, maneuvering her head so that she was looking directly at Richie. The older teen visibly grimaced at the fierceness in those eyes. With Beverly, the possible punishments for his hasty departure were endless. She stared at him, seemingly lost in thought. Richie's eyebrows pinched together as he spared her a half smile and waved cautiously. Beverly smirked in response, but the softness in her eyes said it all.

He was forgiven.

Richie got off the chair and stretched his long limbs, shoving his hands into the pockets of his tuxedo. As he began to walk towards the exit when he noticed Stan and Mike at the punch bowl. Mike rubbed Stan's shoulders reassuringly, which led Richie to believe that Mike was giving him a pep talk. Stan only nodded absently, his eyes staring off in the distance.

A curvy woman interrupted them, tapping Mike on the shoulder and he wrapped his arm around her shoulder, kissing her cheek gently. Stan smiled at the pair and put out his hand to introduce himself, but she ignored it and hugged him tightly instead. Richie watched as the three talked for a while, all enjoying each others' company. When a slow song came on, Mike looked to his date, and she looked back at him and grinned. They appeared to be perfectly in sync as they gave each other a look that only the other understood- or so they thought.

Richie knew Mike like the back of his hand. The man was selfless and kind. Richie used to tease Mike that he was sweeter than honey, but in his defense, it was true. Mike loved without any restraint and always looked out for the good of others around him. As Richie watched Mike's date's mannerisms, he knew they were silently agreeing not to leave Stan alone on prom night. A smile radiated Richie's face, feeling genuine happiness for Mike. He had found a girl just as great as himself; somebody that would go to the end of the earth for the ones she loves. His smile faltered as he watched Stan politely dismiss them, pointing his finger towards the dance floor. Reluctantly, the pair left and began to dance to a slow song.

As always, Stan's outfit was entirely thought out and executed without a flaw. He wore a red tuxedo, with a white button-up shirt and black slacks. Instead of a boutonniere, he had a white brooch of a dove pinned to his tuxedo's pocket. His curls were tamer than Richie's, and he must have just had a haircut because they weren't as long as he remembered them to be. It had to be a crime that he hadn't been there to tease Stan afterward. He wanted to walk away so badly, but he could only stare at Stan who looked frantically around the room.

Suddenly, Stan's words resonated through Richie's ears, *"I want to do something entirely outside of my comfort zone."*

"Goddamnit," Richie moaned to himself as he walked over to the refreshment table.

Stan's face contorted into a scowl upon seeing Richie. They had been best friends and Richie had dropped everyone with not even as much as a syllable. It was infuriating.

Richie, with as much grace as a car accident, wrapped his arm around the other. "Hey, Stan the man! *Looking goood~!* " He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Stan elbowed Richie in the hip and then folded his arms across his chest, glaring, "If only I could say the same. You look like you got dressed in five minutes."

"It was ten minutes, actually, Stan, didn't your mother teach you that

it was rude to assume?" Richie retorted quickly.

"Why am I not surprised," Stan stated bluntly becoming more increasingly annoyed by the second. "What do you want? Can't you see that I am busy?"

Richie looked at him in disbelief. He knew for a fact that Stan was anything but busy. However, Richie could play that game. "Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt your hot date, Stan." He laughed, and caressed the refreshment table's surface.

Stan's lips pursed and he began to tap his foot impatiently as he poured himself some punch from the bowl. "Just spit it out, Richie!"

Richie could feel that Stan was about to walk away, so he quickly got to the point, "Why don't you go ask Bill to dance with you?"

"W-what?" Stan gasped, squeezing the plastic cup too hard in causing the liquid to spill out all over the floor.

"I didn't ask you to turn into Bill, Stan. What I said was why don't you go ask Bill to dance with you?"

"I heard you the first time. But, you've got to be kidding! You completely stop talking to everyone and now you're over here trying to give me love advice? You have some fucking nerve."

Richie shrugged and rubbed a hand through his hair, "Like I told Haystack, I know I've made some mistakes... but I just couldn't leave without telling you to fulfill that promise you made to yourself. Don't you remember? You wanted to do something daring. I'd say going after the guy you've been crushing on for years would be a good start."

Stan's jaw clenched as his face became void of emotion. He had known that Richie had seen through him all of those years ago, staring at Bill, but he would have never expected Richie to be the one encouraging him to go for it. Stan exhaled deeply, "What do I do if he says no?"

"He is not going to say no. Have you looked at yourself today?"

Stan's frown curved a bit before a small smile broke out on his face, but he was still doubtful. "What do I do when that doesn't work?"

"I'll kick his ass and yours too if you don't go over there right now!" Richie gave him a reassuring shove.

Stan shifted his attention back to Richie right as the entrance of the gymnasium swung open. Stan's face softened as one of his eyebrows raised. "Why don't you follow your own advice, Tozier?"

Richie wanted to ask Stan what he meant, but his mind became frigid and his body shut down. He did not like the tone of Stan's voice. *No, he didn't like it one bit.* An adorable laugh pierced the atmosphere and traveled straight into his cerebellum, confirming his suspicions.

Fuck.

Reluctantly, he turned around and the rest of the world ceased to exist. An array of fireworks went off in his head, like in those sappy love movies he hated, and it may have been pushing it, but Richie could have sworn an angel gained its wings.

The man who he had spent countless sleepless nights over, who he had yearned to hold for the past four months was standing only a few feet away from him. Richie's eyes couldn't get any wider behind his coke-bottled glasses as they looked Eddie's body up and down, taking him in as if he was a much-needed glass of water. Similar to his own, Eddie wore a basic black tuxedo, unbuttoned to reveal a white button-up shirt. A black bow tie with pink floral print encircled his neck, matched perfectly with the form-fitting slacks that exposed his dainty ankles. Eddie's hair was parted to the side effortlessly, but a few stray locks rebelled, falling over his forehead. The corners of Richie's mouth began to upturn, and unshed tears fogged his vision when the realization finally dawned on him.

He had made the worst mistake of his life that fateful day in December when he walked away. He didn't know it then, but he left behind everything he'd ever wanted. Eddie was the one who was always there, supporting him and seeing him through the good and the bad times. He inspired Richie to overcome his obstacles, encouraging him to find a dream and hold onto it. Eddie gave Richie

self-worth, something his parents stole from him at such a young age with every sip of alcohol they drank and every cruel blow they placed on his body. Above all else, Eddie made sure that he knew that he was loved, no matter what Richie did. Richie could never do any wrong.

They were best friends with so much potential to be more, but Richie had ruined that. Inadvertently, his legs began to carry him towards Eddie; there were so many things that he needed to say. All of it stopped, his body becoming heavier as he watched a tall man approaching Eddie, holding out his hand to dance. Richie froze in place, staring intently at the small smile that graced Eddie's face as he accepted the other man's hand. Richie's fists clenched painfully at his sides as he watched the pair move onto the dance floor.

An upbeat pop song came on and both men began swaying to the music. Richie's eyes were glued on Eddie, watching as he turned his body in tune with the music, not missing a beat. Eddie was full on laughing now as the other guy gyrated around, sliding his shoes against the smooth flooring. Richie felt his stomach bubbling with anger and jealousy. He used to be able to make Eddie laugh like that. But now this guy--

Richie's heart fell into his stomach, liquefying when the man twirled Eddie around the dance floor. His face twisted into a scowl and his eyes were blazing with rage. Eddie had always been *his* best friend. *His* confidant. *His* everything. And now he was with somebody else, doing all the things *he* should have been doing.

He wanted to be happy for Eddie. Out of everyone he knew, Eddie was the most deserving of a fairytale ending. He had endured hell with his mother. But, like a phoenix, he rose from the ashes; overcoming his sexuality, fear of germs, and his demons. He did so gracefully, with a smile on his face, all while supporting all of the other Losers during their most difficult times. It was finally Eddie's turn; but Richie was too blinded by the rage fueling his body to consider how Eddie felt.

Watching the other man placing his dirty hands on Eddie's hips, pulling them closer as he whispered into the hypochondriac's ear was the final straw for Richie, who was practically boiling with envy. He

pushed through the crowd of dancing students, getting hit a couple of times by flailing limbs, and even eliciting a few curse words, but he ignored all of it. All he could concentrate on was biting his bottom lip, swallowing all of the foul things he needed to say.

Once he was within arms distance of the two, he tapped on the man's shoulder roughly, making sure not to look at the disappointment etched on Eddie's face. His voice was laced with venom as he spoke, "Hey. No one wants to see that shit. Keep it PG, alright?"

"Who are you? The dance committee or something?" The guy retorted, brushing Richie off. He turned to look at Eddie, "So, what do you say? Wanna go out with me?" He pushed his hands up Eddie's hips going up the back of his tuxedo to trace circles on his back.

Richie did a double take, staring at the guy as if he grew two heads. This motherfucker had some nerve ignoring him, but to touch Eddie right in front of him? Oh, he had no idea what demons he had just unleashed.

Richie grabbed his upper arm and shoved him as hard as he could, forcing him to fall back away from Eddie. "Maybe I am. Wanna do something about it?" Richie's face hardened, a muscle in his jaw twitching.

The other man aggressively shoved Richie into the crowd, drawing all of the attention in the room to become directed on the three of them. Richie gave the man no time to think before he slammed his fist directly into his face, first one, and then relentlessly. The sound of his punches echoed off of the walls and mixed with Eddie's screams. Richie didn't pay his pleas any heed. No, Eddie, he wouldn't stop. Not until Richie saw this dude's face beaten to a bloody pulp. Richie kept hitting until he felt the cartilage in the man's nose shift at an odd angle.

Eddie grabbed onto the back of Richie's tuxedo frantically, "Richie! Richie! Get the fuck off of him! What's wrong with you?"

Somehow, hearing the hurt in Eddie's voice made him even more frustrated. He looked back down at the man's beaten face, thinking of everything he might have already done with Eddie and his jealousy

increased. "Fuck you! Fuck you!" Richie said through gritted teeth as he began punching the man again, unleashing all of his pent-up negative energy from the last four months.

"R-R-Ritchie! Stop!" Bill shouted, hauling him off of Eddie's date.

Richie was frenzied, but Bill's strong arms tightened around him, hindering his movements. When the beaten man lifted his head, pride and satisfaction welled up throughout Richie's being. Blood from the man's nose stained his shirt and his eye was almost swollen shut. Richie cackled obnoxiously as he began to taunt the male, flipping him off with both hands.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, Richie!?" Eddie screamed over the music.

All of a sudden the music stopped and teachers, along with security guards, were swarming into the gymnasium. The principal, Mr. Miller, ran over and helped the injured male off of the floor, "What is going on here?"

"Well, you see here, I decided to rearrange this guy's face because--"

Stan cut him off, "Beep Beep Richie!"

"Tozier, Kaspbrak, Uris, and Denbrough, Leave the premises immediately!" The principal shouted furiously. Bill loosened his hold on Richie, who wiggled out of Bill's arms a few moments later.

"No! Please. Mr. Miller, Bill and Stan had nothing to do with this--"

"Is that true, boys?" Mr. Miller asked.

Stan nodded his head in agreement with Eddie, while Bill took advantage of the principal's distraction, "E-Eddie, you don't have to do this. You don't have to leave--"

"Yeah, I do, Bill. Stay here with the rest of the Losers and enjoy prom, okay? Dance with Stan. He really likes you." Eddie's voice came out as a whisper.

Bill blushed as he looked over to Stan, who was arguing with the

principal. Mr. Miller motioned for Stan to shut up before turning to Bill, "Mr. Denbrough, is it true? You and Stanley had nothing to do with this."

Bill looked at Eddie once again for confirmation. Eddie nodded his head slowly. "Y-Yeah. It's true."

"Okay. Escort the other two out."

A security guard caught Eddie off guard, grabbing his wrist tightly. "Hey! Let go of me. If you bruise me, not even god will be able to protect you!"

Richie pushed the security guard preoccupied with Eddie, his anger coming back in vast quantities. "Hey! Let go of him-" Another security guard grabbed him harshly. "Whoa! Can you be less rough? You didn't even buy me dinner first! I like to be wined and dined before-"

"Shut the fuck up, Richie!" Eddie snarled.

Richie became limp and complied with the security guard who was carrying him out. Meanwhile, Eddie pushed against his captor so much that they were practically dragging him out. The doors opened and the cold air hit their skin as they were thrown out onto the side of the building.

They both heard the door being slammed and locked behind them. Eddie shuddered as tears slipped past his eyes.

"Are you fucking serious, Richie!?" Eddie got into Richie's face, almost spitting on him in his rage. "What the fuck was that back there? Huh!?"

"Look, I'm sorry, Eds."

"NO! Don't you dare!" Eddie screamed, pounding his fists against Richie's chest hard enough to bruise. "When you walked out on me you lost the right to call me that!" Richie looked down at him but did nothing to prevent Eddie's movements. "Why! Why did you pull this shit, huh!?" Eddie was on the verge of hyperventilating, gasping for air.

Richie reached into his pocket to grab the spare aspirator he carried, but Eddie was faster and got his inhaler first. "I can't change what I did. I'll go explain to the teachers that it was all my fault so you can go back and dance with your *boyfriend*."

After taking a couple of hits, Eddie's breath evened out, but his heart didn't. "So you do this just to spite me? Because you thought I had a boyfriend? That is what it is, isn't it? You don't want me to be happy. Not with you, or with anyone else!"

"No. You have it all wrong. I don't know why I did it, Eddie," Richie lied. He sighed deeply. "I'm sorry for destroying your night."

"You didn't destroy anything!" Richie looked at Eddie in confusion just as the boy began crying again, his body wracked with sobs. "You don't get to have this power over me! Not anymore, R-Richie! I am going to be happy because I deserve to be." Eddie pinched his upper nose, trying to force back the tears. "I just need some closure. I need to know why you left me, Richie. Please. You at least owe me that!"

Eddie's words hit Richie like a ton of bricks. This breakdown wasn't because of what happened right now; it was about how their friendship had ended months prior. He leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands. Richie Tozier was never good at explaining his emotions, so he just stood there silently.

"I've never been good enough. That's what it comes down to, huh? You know deep down that you can find someone way better than me," Eddie broke the silence.

Richie winced at the melancholy tone of Eddie's voice. *No. No. No!* This was the opposite of what he wanted. He stared at Eddie's face, taking in just how swollen and scarlet his cheeks were from crying. Richie had caused Eddie pain. Again. Fuck, he hated himself. Eddie turned around with his head hung low in shame, not wanting any of Richie's pity.

Richie's heart beat faster when Eddie turned around and began to walk away. Everything moved in slow motion, but his thoughts were forming rapidly. He had already lost Eddie once before, realized his feelings when it was too late, and now it was going to happen for a

second time. His mouth felt like cotton, and he could feel the heat burning his face as the gears in his head worked on overdrive.

Tonight he had helped Ben, Beverly, Stan, and Bill come into the arms of the ones they loved. Yet, he still had trouble letting go. To love someone in that way meant that they could end up hating each other, just like his parents. Or they could end up permanently separated between life and death, just like Eddie's. Richie didn't want that because that meant he was vulnerable and exposed. Everyone would know his weakness and could exploit it, given a chance.

But Eddie was going to walk away forever. None of that would matter if that happened, because he and Eddie would have no story to tell. He would fall in his mother's footsteps and become an alcoholic, because without Eddie, why would life be worth living?

Maybe loving Eddie made him stronger.

"Eddie!" Richie's voice sounded foreign to him, but Eddie turned around, only a few feet away from Richie. "There is no one in this world better for me than you. It's always been you too, Eds!"

Suddenly their bodies were drawn together. Who had moved first was not clear, but it didn't matter. Their lips were finally clashing together. They ignored the initial awkwardness of their noses smacking together and continued kissing. Eddie wrapped his arms around Richie's neck, deepening the passionate kiss between them.

Richie's mind was going haywire; one second they were fighting with each other, and the next he was ravaging Eddie up against the wall of the gymnasium, the smell of his cologne and shampoo fueling the fire burning in his belly.

Richie brushed his tongue against Eddie's bottom lip, earning him a shocked groan, but he had no time to ask if there was something wrong. He forced his way into the man's mouth and began to overtake him, immediately tasting minty toothpaste. When he felt Eddie respond to him and their tongues met, Richie became a starving man. He wrapped his arms around Eddie tightly and began to haul him up.

Eddie's desire to be closer to Richie gave him enough confidence to wrap his strong legs around the older male's waist as Richie picked him up. He tightened his current position, making him appear to be bear hugging Richie, their lips still connected as their tongues battled for dominance.

Richie's hands rubbed the back of Eddie's thighs and trailed up his body to take their rightful place on his hips. He pulled away from Eddie's mouth, trying to catch his breath. "I'm sorry I didn't say it sooner, I just couldn't."

Eddie brought his finger up to Richie's lips and shushed him. Once he was sure Richie was going to stay quiet, he placed his forehead against Richie's gently, looking deeply into his eyes. "I love you, Richie Tozier."

Richie grinned fondly taking the opportunity to kiss Eddie's button nose. "I love you too, Eddie Kaspbrak. Always have, always will." His confession came out curt and sweet, but Richie wouldn't be Richie without throwing in a joke. "Does this mean I'm gonna get laid?" He laughed.

Eddie arched his eyebrows as he leaned over to whisper in Richie's ear, "That depends. Take me home and find out, Trashmouth."